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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 001157

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE, ALSO FOR WHA - A/S VALENZUELA, WHA/CEN,
WHA/AND, AND WHA/CCA
NSC FOR TOBIN BRADLEY, ALSO FOR DAN RESTREPO

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SUBJECT: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DECEMBER 2, 2009, MEETING WITH
SPANISH SYG OF THE PRESIDENCY BERNARDINO LEON

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Arnold A. Chacon, Reasons 1.4(b),(d).

11. (C) Summary. The Charge d'Affaires met December 2, 2009, with Spanish SYG of the Presidency Bernardino Leon. They discussed Afghanistan, the police training mission for Iraq, the King's request for a meeting with President Obama, Spain's EU Presidency, Kosovo, Honduras, Venezuela, and Cuba. End summary.

Afghanistan and Iraq

12. (C) The CDA reviewed for Leon the highlights of President Obama's speech. Leon praised the speech and described President Zapatero's December 1 phone conversation with Vice President Biden as "excellent." Leon said the GOS was studying the possibility of sending an additional 500 Spanish troops (bringing the Spanish total to 1,500) and another 40-60 Guardia Civil police trainers (in addition to the 40 Spain has already committed to send, bringing the total to 80-100). Leon cautioned that consultations with the MOD and Ministry of Interior were still needed and that the Spanish Congress would have to be convinced. He said Zapatero would personally make the case to Congress.

13. (C) Regarding the Guardia Civil, Leon said sending more of them on international missions was always controversial because of the terrorist threat from ETA here in Spain. Leon mentioned that Zapatero's Socialist Party was six points behind the opposition in the polls, noting that a troop increase in Afghanistan would not be politically popular. He describe a troop increase as an uphill political battle, and said the GOS had been surprised by NATO SYG Rasmussen's call for 1,000 more Spanish troops. Nevertheless, he said Zapatero wanted to help. Regarding financial contributions for Afghanistan, Leon said the GOS was also looking at increases there, although he declined to offer specifics.

14. (C) The CDA raised the issue of Guardia Civil trainers for Iraq, stressing the importance of getting an assessment to Baghdad as soon as possible. Leon professed surprise that the team had not already been sent, and the CDA assured him

it had not. He urged that it be launched before Christmas.

King's Request for Appointment with POTUS and the EU Summit

15. (C) In the context of discussing the Vice President Biden-Zapatero conversation, Leon mentioned the King's desire to visit Washington for a meeting with President Obama. He asked that the CDA convey a request for a meeting on January 25. Leon stressed the King -- who he said had enjoyed excellent relations with U.S. Presidents for decades -- wanted a substantive meeting. The Queen would not be accompanying him on the trip, and his focus would not be "social." Leon mentioned Spain looked forward to hosting President Obama for an EU Summit in May 2010, noting Spain was flexible on the dates but would like to confirm something as soon as possible.

Kosovo

16. (C) On Kosovo, the CDA explained U.S. concerns about possible Spanish opposition to the renewal of Peter Feith's EUSR mandate and to the continued double-hatting of the ICR/EUSR. The CDA noted he had recently raised the matter with the MFA DG for North America and Non-EU Europe who gave assurances of Spain's desire to work closely and cooperatively with the U.S. while flagging concerns about Feith's negative attitude towards Spain. The CDA noted that there was confusion even among European partners about Spain's position regarding Feith. Leon recited Spanish difficulties when it came to recognition of Kosovo, saying such a move would be very complicated domestically because of escalating separatist sentiment in the Basque Country and

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Catalonia. Nevertheless, he said the GOS wanted to be pragmatic and did not want to work against the U.S. behind the scenes. He insisted Spain wanted to coordinate with the U.S. The CDA urged that Spain in that case take the pragmatic approach regarding Feith, tell Feith directly that his remarks about Spain were unhelpful, and support the renewal of his mandate. As a footnote, Leon mentioned that the Slovenian Ambassador recently asked FM Moratinos if he or any other high-level Spanish official would travel to Kosovo during Spain's EU Presidency. Moratinos, according to Leon, said that the GOS would if it were necessary.

Honduras, Venezuela, Cuba

7.(C) On Honduras, Leon said Central America did not need another basket case to add to the ones it already had, citing the ongoing serious political and security problems plaguing Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. He described Zelaya as crazy and hoped that Lobo would find some way to build consensus on a way forward. He said Spain was trying to keep its options open and hinted the GOS had not entirely ruled out the possibility the Prince of Asturias would attend Lobo's inauguration. He noted that Brazil was taking a hard-line position but said Brazil was also fed up with Zelaya.

18. (C) Leon said that, surprisingly, the subject of Honduras did not dominate conversations at the recent Iberoamerican Summit in Portugal. That honor went to Chavez and the question of how to cope with him. Leon said that Chavez realized that Uribe (who Leon said was very concerned about the economic consequences of confrontation with Venezuela) was ready de-escalate tensions, and because that did not suit Chavez' purposes, he simply stayed away from the recent Iberoamerican Summit. Leon said Brazil was probably the best interlocutor with Chavez, although he noted Chavez was avoiding contact with Lula foreign policy advisor Marco Aurelio Garcia, who was seeking to bridge the Venezuela-Colombia divide.

¶9. (C) The CDA asked about Moratinos' statements that Spain, during its EU Presidency, would seek to rescind the EU Common Position on Cuba. Leon was skeptical this could be done. He said Moratinos was always working to find ways to make progress with Cuba, but all Spain's interlocutors there (Perez Roque, Carlos Lage) had disappeared. He called current Cuban Foreign Minister Rodriguez a "nobody" and said Moratinos' last visit was a search in vain for an "economic opening." Leon emphasized that in anything the Spanish did with Cuba, they wanted to be "value added" and wanted to coordinate closely with the U.S.

Comment

¶10. (C) Leon is typically more realistic when discussing Venezuela and Cuba than our MFA contacts, including Moratinos. While Moratinos sometimes seems to suggest Spain can play a role in improving U.S. relations with those two countries, Spain's actual influence with Venezuela and Cuba appears to us limited (as Leon's comments suggest). Moreover, when Leon talks of "value added" and coordinating with the U.S. on Cuba, we should not assume that means Moratinos agrees.
CHACON